HAPPY NEW YEAR 2017! - GEORGE KAMITANI PRESENTS THE AMANO-IWATO

Posted 22 December 2020
By Richmond Lee

The following is an expanded transcription of a Twitter thread from 2017. You can see the original Twitter thread here:
twitter.com/Richmond_Lee/status/819580003734077440

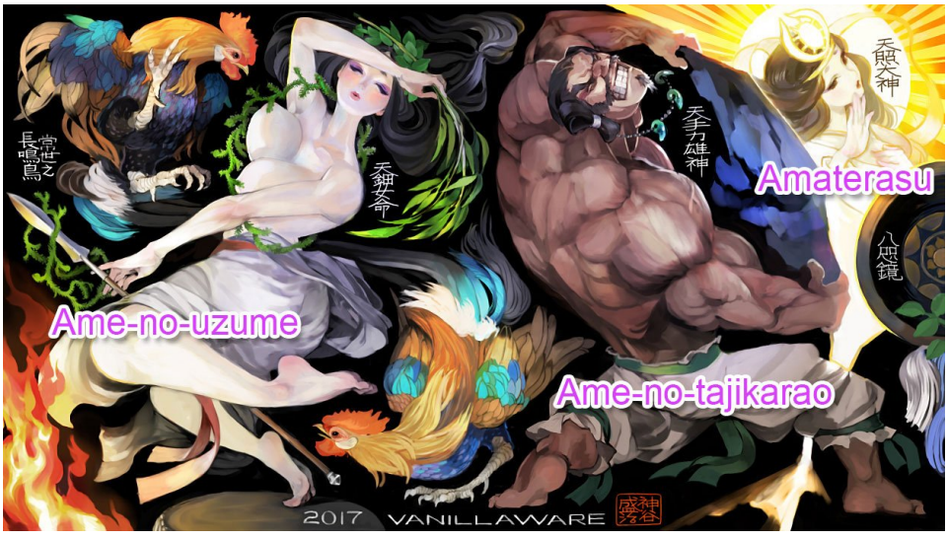
Alright! Who's up for a history lesson! Tonight we are diving into Japanese mythology courtesy of George Kamitani, founder of Vanillaware! Since 2008, George Kamitani has maintained a tradition of creating an original illustration to ring in each new year. You can see a gallery of these beautiful works at the official Vanillaware website here:
vanillaware.co.jp/gallery.htm

Today we're going to focus on George Kamitani's 2017 New Years Art, which depicts a famous scene from Japanese mythology known as the Amano-Iwato (天岩戸, literally "*heavenly rock cave*").

The Amano-Iwato is one of many tales recorded in the Kojiki (**古事記**, "*Records of Ancient Matters*"), the oldest known literay text in Japanese history which is said to have been written in the early 8th century.

George Kamitani's New Year 2017 illustration depicts 3 gods:

- Amaterasu (**天照**) - goddess of the sun, one of the chief deities of Shinto
- Ame-no-tajikarao (**天手力男神**) - god of sports and physical power
- Ame-no-uzume (**天宇受売命**) - goddess of the arts, dawn, mirth, meditation and revelry



Amaterasu has locked herself in a cave after her brother Susanoo (**須佐之男**), Shinto god of the sea and storms, went on a drunken rampage where he raised her fields, flayed her pet horse then threw it through the roof of her palace, where it crashed into her weaving room, smashing a loom and killing one of her handmaidens.

Susanoo Flays the Heavenly Piebald Horse
Illustration: **Shunsen Natori** (名取春仙), Meiji Era

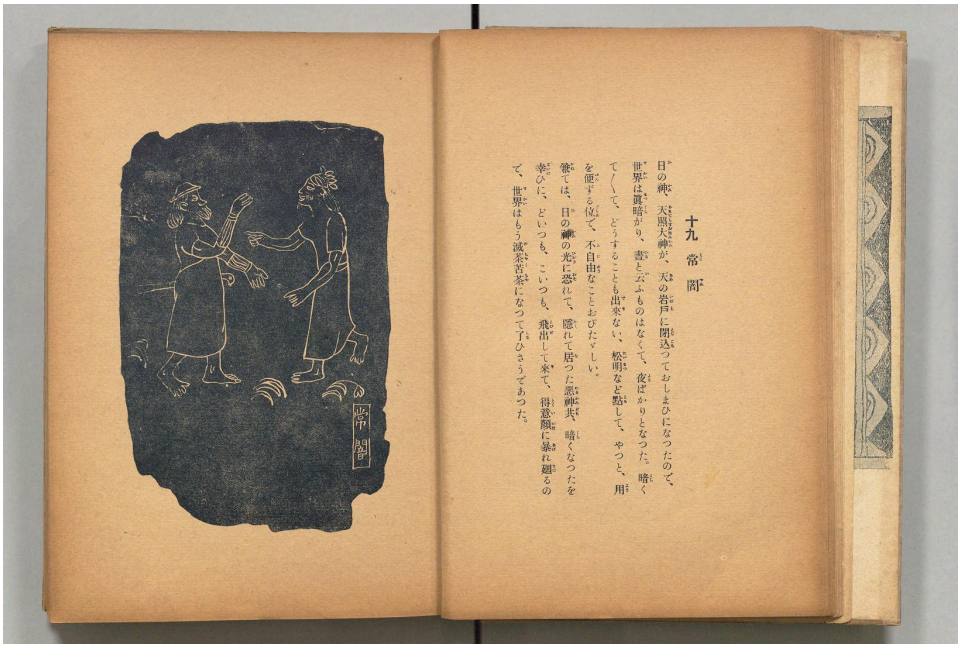
Source:
https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1716384

Susanoo's Orgy (スサノオの乱行)
Illustration: **Yuri Ogata** (***@colornix***)

Source:
https://www.phantaporta.com/2019/09/1.html

He also pooped all over her dining hall (yes this is part of the original myth!)

Amaterasu, understandably gets so fed up with her brother's BS that she decides to leave everything behind. As the goddess of the sun, Amaterasu is one of the most important deities in the Shinto pantheon. In her absence the world is plunged into darkness. All life will perish without the sun, so the gods conspire to lure her out.



source: https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1716384/25

They place crowing roosters at the cave entrance and tell her that the sun has returned because a new goddess has been born to replace her.

They also hang the Yata no Kagami (八咫鏡), a polished bronze mirror and one of the "three sacred treasures" of Japan, at the cave entrance.

Yata no Kagami (八咫鏡?) is a sacred bronze mirror that is part of the Imperial Regalia of Japan. It is said to be housed in Ise Grand Shrine in Mie Prefecture, Japan, although a lack of public access makes this difficult to verify. The Yata no Kagami represents "wisdom" or "honesty," depending on the source. Its name literally means "The Eight Hand Mirror," a reference to its octagonal shape. Mirrors in ancient Japan represented truth because they merely reflected what was shown, and were a source of much mystique and reverence (being uncommon items). Japanese folklore is rich in stories of life before mirrors were commonplace.

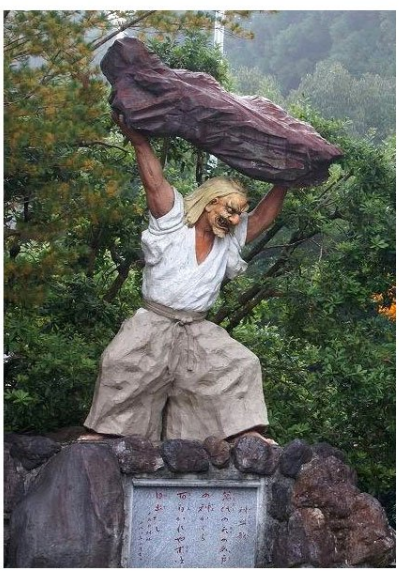
Then they throw a big party! In the midst of the revelry, the godess Amenouzume strips her off clothes and does a lewd dance, drawing a huge audience and causing riotous laughter!

Ame-no-Uzume-no-mikoto (天宇受売命, 天鈿女命) is the Shinto goddess of dawn, mirth and revelry. When the goddess Amaterasu went into hiding, Ame-no-Uzume helped lure her out with a wild dance. Kagura (神楽, かぐら, "god-entertainment"), an ancient and traditional form of Japanese dance, is said to be inspired from this event. Kagura is still widely practiced in Japan today during various festivals.

Curious of the commotion, Amaterasu peeks outside and is mesmerised by the beauty of her own reflection (mirrors were rare in ancient times!)

Seizing the opportunity, Ame-no-tajikarao (天手力男神), the Shinto god of physical strength, rips open the cave door and tosses it aside!

George Kamitani's depiction of Ame-no-tajikarao (#天手力男神)

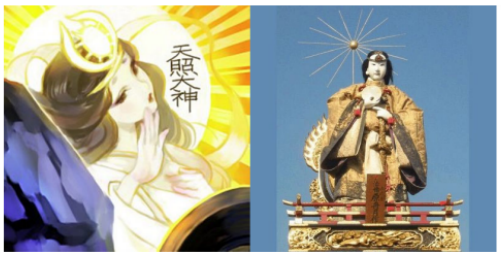


A famous statue of Ame-no-tajikarao at the entrance of the real life Amano-Iwato shrine in Miyazaki prefecture

Amaterasu (天照) comes out of hiding and light returns to the world, restoring life and balance! And that is the story of the Amano-Iwato!

More fun facts: The story of Amaterasu (天照) hiding in the cave was likely inspired by solar eclipses.

Amaterasu (天照) is the goddess of the sun and chief deity of the Shinto belief system. She remains quite popular in Japanese pop culture to this day!



Emperor Jimmu (神武天皇), the legendary first emperor of Japan, was said to have been a direct descendant of Amaterasu (天照)

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